NEWS ANALYSIS NO. 1-1797 NOVEMBER 9, 1976
MARK HOPKINS/NAIROBI

MOSCOW, UNESCO AND THE PRESS

ANNCR:

LOOKING AT THE UNESCO MEETING IN NAIROBI THAT RETURNED TO COMMITTEE A SOVIET BACKED RESOLUTION MENTIONING GOVERNMENT CONTROL FOR INTERNATIONAL MEDIA, VOA'S MARK HOPKINS HAS THESE OBSERVATIONS ON THE SOVIET APPROACH TO COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA.

VOICE:

THE SOVIET MASS MEDIA WE KNOW TODAY -- THE DEADLY-EARNEST PRAVDA, OR THE PONDEROUSLY INSTRUCTIVE MOSCOW TELEVISION -- ARE CHILDREN OF A REVOLUTION, BORN IN DAYS WHEN VLADIMIR LENIN HELD THAT THE PRESS AND REVOLUTION WENT HAND IN GLOVE.

THE PRESS HAS AT TIMES BEEN WIELDED AS A POLITICAL INSTRUMENT IN THE WEST, TOO. BUT EVENTS MOVED IN SOVIET RUSSIA SO THAT ONLY ONE PARTY -- THE COMMUNIST -- SURVIVED, AND ONLY ONE PRESS. LENIN LINKED THE PRESS TO LETHAL WEAPONS...JOSEF STALIN DESCRIBED IT AS A BATTLEFIELD COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM... AND NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV LIKED TO CALL THE PRESS A "TRANSMISSION BELT" TO THE MASSES.

THE SOVIET THEORY, BRIEFLY PUT, HOLDS THAT MASS MEDIA SERVE THE NATIONAL PURPOSES -- THE NATIONAL PURPOSES, IN FACT, SET BY A RULING PARTY APPARATUS. WITH THAT THEORY HAVE COME CENSORSHIP AND CONTROLS THAT HAVE MADE THE SOVIET MEDIA DULL FARE, BUT ALMOST UNERRINGLY SPEAKING WITH A SINGLE VOICE ON VITAL POLICIES.

THIS IS THE SOIL THAT NURTURES SOVIET BACKING OF THE KIND OF RESOLUTION DEBATED AT THE UNESCO MEETING IN NAIROBI. MOSCOW HAS TRIED NOT ONLY TO COMPRESS MASS MEDIA UNDER GOVERNMENT

CONTROLS, BUT ALSO TO ERECT A PROTECTIVE SHIELD AGAINST OUTSIDE VOICES. SOVIET OFFICIALS LOOK WITH CONCERN, BORDERING ON APPREHENSION, TO THE DAY THAT ORBITING SATELLITES WILL BROADCAST DIRECTLY TO HOME TELEVISION SETS. ONE SOVIET AIM IS TO GET INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT IN THE UNITED NATIONS BANNING THIS FORM OF NOW TECHNICALLY FEASIBLE COMMUNICATION.

THE SOVIET UNION IS NOT ALONE IN THESE VIEWS THAT SUBJECT JOURNALISM TO POLITICS -- ALTHOUGH THEY DID NOT CARRY THE DAY IN NAIROBI. INDEED, THERE ARE WESTERN STUDENTS OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS WHO ARGUE THAT DURING URGENT YEARS OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT A CRITICAL, ADVERSARY PRESS IN THE WESTERN TRADITION HAMPERS RATHER THAN HELPS.

THE ATTEMPT OF NON-ALIGNED NATIONS TO CREATE THEIR OWN INFORMATION NETWORK TO COUNTER WESTERN NEWS IS A LIVING INSTANCE OF A SHARP, GLOBAL DIVERGENCE ON THE ROLE OF MASS COMMUNICATIONS

THIS ISSUE IS FAR FROM RESOLVED. WESTERN STUDIES OF MASS MEDIA WORLDWIDE HAVE TENDED TO SEE PRESS FREEDOM SHRINKING, PRECISELY AS AUTHORITARIAN GOVERNMENTS GROW.

GH/RCS